

Zionist Carnage Spreads

Why Can't Anyone Stop Netanyahu?

4 OCTOBER—In the year since October 7, the infernal Zionist machine has massacred tens of thousands of Palestinians. Now through continuous escalation it threatens a major regional war. In April, Israel bombed the Iranian embassy in Syria, in July it assassinated Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh in Teheran, and since then it has engaged in an offensive against Hezbollah, exploding thousands of pagers, killing its leaders—including Hasan Nasrallah—and raiding southern Lebanon. In response to Israel's crimes, millions have demonstrated, the International Criminal Court (ICC) has opened an investigation and Iran and Hezbollah have shot missiles at Israel. However, nothing seems to deter Israel's escalation.

Part of the explanation is that Netanyahu's government of butchers and fanatics is clear on its objective: the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians from the river to the sea. The obstacle it confronts is that over the past decades Iran has gradually eroded Israel's military dominance in the region. Not only has Iran developed advanced weaponry, including the technology for nuclear weapons, but it has also taken advantage of disastrous U.S. wars in the region to consolidate a network of powerful militias. These developments are viewed as existential threats to Israel's Zionist project.

Now the Zionist right sees a historic opportunity to deal a crippling blow to Iran. Israel's population has been marshaled into a genocidal frenzy since October 7, its international reputation is already destroyed, and the U.S. promises unconditional support. In this context, Netanyahu thinks that by continuously escalating the conflict he can either secure a major capitulation from Iran and its allies or drag the U.S. into a direct war with the Islamic Republic. In either case, he hopes to ensure unopposed expansion into remaining Palestinian land and the long-term defense of Israel's borders.

However, the question remains: "Why can't anyone stop Netanyahu?" In some cases, the answer is obvious. The U.S. may not currently see a war with Iran as desirable, but this is entirely secondary to its commitment to defend Israel no matter what. Even if Biden were not senile, the lack of political determination to stop Israel's aggression would remain. As for the governments of Britain, Germany, France, Japan and other advanced



Top: Netanyahu at UN General Assembly, 27 September. **Bottom:** Israeli bombing of Dahieh neighborhood in southern Beirut, Lebanon, 2 October.

"democracies," they are sycophants committed to upholding the U.S. world order even if it leads to the devastation of their own economies. They are not about to put up a fuss.

But what about the forces opposing Israel, such as Iran? Or the millions who have demonstrated against the genocide in Gaza? Why haven't they been able to stop the bloody spiral in West Asia? Here we must not only look at the balance of military force but also examine the political outlook of the various oppositions to Netanyahu. As we shall see, the real reason his government hasn't been stopped is that its opponents lack a bold and coherent program to defeat Zionism and throw off imperialist domination of the region.

The Ayatollah's Choice: Capitulation or Jihad?

First, we must look at the Axis of Resistance led by Iran, which includes Hezbollah and the Houthis in Yemen. Unlike most other Muslim regimes that condemn Israel in speeches while remaining aligned with the U.S. in practice, the Iranian regime and its allies have directly confronted Israel, including

by launching missiles onto its territory. That said, displays of force like that of October 1 do not prove that the Axis of Resistance is committed to Palestinian liberation, nor that it has any sort of coherent plan to defeat Israel or more importantly the U.S. In fact, the truth is quite the opposite.

The overriding priority of the Iranian rulers is the preservation of the theocratic Shia regime. Since it was established by overthrowing the Shah, a U.S. puppet, the regime has been in continuous conflict with imperialist interests in the region. At the same time, the theocratic and capitalist nature of the regime limits Iran's ability to push back and defeat imperialism by uniting the peoples of West Asia in a common struggle.

The regime's problems start with Iran's own people, many of whom hate living under the whip of Islamic law and the mullahs. Women in particular are denied the most basic democratic rights, including that of deciding how to dress. Iran also includes different nationalities and religious groups which suffer repression and a denial of national rights. These internal tensions were on full display in the 2022 social explosion that occurred after the death in police custody of Jina Amini.

This tense internal situation means that whatever threat comes from the imperialists and Israel it must be balanced with stabilizing the domestic front, which in many ways appears more dangerous to the ruling clerics. This explains why in the midst of Israel's genocide in Gaza the Ayatollah allowed Masoud Pezeshkian to run for president and get elected on a platform of pacifying the West. This was not a u-turn but a logical outcome of the proclaimed doctrine of "strategic patience" in regard to Israel. The reformist wing of the regime thinks that if it can avoid a direct confrontation with Israel and obtain economic concessions from the West, then it will be able to reduce internal tensions and secure the stability of the regime.

The reformers are conscious that the price of such concessions is to stab the Palestinians and their other allies in the back. In late September, even as Israel was actively decapitating Hezbollah—Iran's main ally in the region—President Pezeshkian was in New York making appeals to reopen the 2015 nuclear negotiations. The shocking inaction at Israel's aggression against Lebanon was justified by a regime insider quoted in the *Financial Times* (26 September) saying that "inevitably, some important issues are being set aside for more urgent ones, at least temporarily. This is the price you pay when you adjust your approach in battle."

There is, of course, another wing of the ruling class—the so-called "hard-liners" who want to impose a more draconian religious order internally and pursue a more confrontational course against Israel. It is indeed possible that in a long attritional war with Israel and the U.S., Iran could come out on top. But this would come at a terrible price and at great risk to the regime.

Of course, the U.S. and Israel are very powerful militarily. But in addition to this is the fact that Iran's war effort would be hampered by its religious character. Given the nature of the Islamic Republic, any war would largely be based on Shia sectarianism. On this basis it is impossible to unite the peoples

of the entire region against imperialism and Zionism. Such a war would alienate much of West Asia and make it easy for the enemy—and the Sunni regimes hostile to the Shia—to foster religious and national conflicts among the various oppressed groups. This consideration makes a war with Israel much more costly and its outcome much more uncertain for the ruling clerics.

Lebanon provides a good illustration of the problem. The French colonialists consciously built Lebanon along sectarian lines in order to pit the various religious groups against each other and maintain their rule. But instead of overcoming such divisions and striving to unite Sunni, Shia and Christian against imperialism and Israel, Iran has focused its efforts on building Hezbollah, a militia based on the Shia community. This means that in any conflict with Israel, Hezbollah must not only confront the external foe but also balance relations with other religious groups in Lebanon. This consideration is certainly an important factor in Hezbollah's restraint since October 7.

Clearly neither Hezbollah nor Iran is confident in their ability to confront Israel at the current time. In recent weeks, Netanyahu was able to exploit the indecision and wavering of his adversaries to devastating effect. Israel succeeded in decapitating Hezbollah's leadership and exposed Iran as an unreliable ally. Facing humiliation, the Iranian regime finally responded by shooting a salvo of 180 ballistic missiles at Israel. Now the initiative is back in the hands of Israel, which will decide whether it wants to further escalate the conflict.

One must keep in mind that it is by no means assured that an all-out war in the Middle East would see the position of the U.S. and Israel strengthened—in fact, quite the contrary is likely. That said, for Palestinian liberation and working-class emancipation to be advanced one cannot count on the Axis of Resistance. Instead, what is required is a program that is intransigent in its opposition to imperialism and that can unite the peoples of the Middle East. The pillars of such a program must be:

- *Defend Gaza, the West Bank, Yemen, Lebanon and Iran against Zionist and imperialist attacks!*
- *National liberation of Palestine, and recognition of full national rights, including self-determination for all nations!*
- *No state religion, no imposition of the veil!*
- *Nationalize the property of the imperialists and their domestic stooges!*

Liberal Zionism: Reactionary and Impotent

Despite the wishful thinking of the ideologues of the Axis of Resistance, Israel is not a paper tiger. It will not collapse if its narrative gets exposed or if it suffers economic blows—even severe ones. The two pillars of Israel's strength are the support it receives from the U.S. and the existence of a consolidated Jewish nation on the territory of Palestine. This means that even if it were possible to inflict a disastrous military defeat on Israel, which would put its very existence into question, there is no doubt that the Zionists would be able to inflict catastrophic destruction and that much of the Israeli population would fight to the bitter end for their national existence. Militarily confronting the entire Israeli nation guarantees the maximum resistance and destruction. For this reason, if one is serious about Palestinian liberation, one must have a strategy to undermine Israel's national unity and break an important segment of the population from Zionism.

The past few years have shown that there are indeed important fissures within Israel. The tensions within Israel reflect the country's inexorable slide toward becoming a totalitarian mili-

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tarized theocracy, even for Jews. This trajectory goes to show that a society founded on national oppression not only degrades the oppressed—in this case the Palestinians—but also drags the oppressing nation into barbarity.

Both the 2023 mass demonstrations against Netanyahu's anti-democratic judicial reform and the more recent demonstrations demanding a ceasefire to free the hostages in Gaza were movements based on the liberal wing of the Zionist ruling class. This pole of Israeli society pushes back against the most bellicose and theocratic facets of government policy while at the same time being fully committed to Zionism, that is, to the national oppression of the Palestinians. This gives liberal Zionism a reactionary character. It also means that it is totally impotent in confronting the right wing of Israeli society.

The logic of Zionism is such that the most rabid and confrontational faction of the ruling class will always be more consistent than those who drape themselves in high-minded ideals while continuing to defend the historic crime of Palestinian dispossession. The bankruptcy of liberal Zionist movements is shown clearly by the fact that they evaporate the minute Israel's national defense is posed in any kind of serious way. After October 7, some of Netanyahu's strongest opponents rushed to join his government of national unity. And following Israel's offensives against Lebanon, the movement to free the hostages immediately worked to demobilize itself. The basic fact is that there can be no serious opposition to Netanyahu's band of fanatics without a political break with Zionism and a defense of Palestinian liberation.

There do exist in Israel small forces that stand against Palestinian oppression. However, while they face intense repression, they fail to confront the obstacle that liberal Zionism represents. In the case of groups such as the Internationalist Socialist League (affiliated with the RCIT), the argument is that because Israel is a settler-colonial state, basically nothing can be done now to break the Israeli working class from Zionism. For them the task is simply to stand in liberal solidarity with the Palestinians without seeking to affect Israeli society. Then there are the likes of Socialist Struggle (affiliated with the ISA), which cheer on liberal Zionist movements. For example, they hailed the one-day general strike in early September while raising no opposition to Zionism and sweeping under the rug the fact that it was organized by a labor bureaucracy entirely committed to the national oppression of the Palestinians. In both cases, there is an unwillingness or incapacity to confront workers' deeply entrenched Zionist beliefs.

To crack Israeli society, it is essential to go beyond the ideas in the heads of individuals and look at the material interests of the various classes. While Israel does benefit from a higher standard of living due to its role as the imperialists' thug in the region, conditions for Israeli workers—including Jewish workers—are not good. Palestinian oppression does not benefit Jewish workers—it drags them down by making them powerless to defend their own interests against patriotic bosses and rulers. It also turns them into enforcers of the barbaric oppression of Palestinians, threatening their lives and that of their families and degrading their own humanity.

The key to unlocking these contradictions is to undermine Zionism with a program directed against both its right wing *and* its liberal wing.

- *Full democratic rights for all Palestinians from the river to the sea—Israeli workers will never be free as long as Palestinians are oppressed.*
- *Break the connection with the U.S.—serving as the agents of imperialism will never bring safety.*

- *Redistribute capitalist land and wealth to workers and Palestinians.*

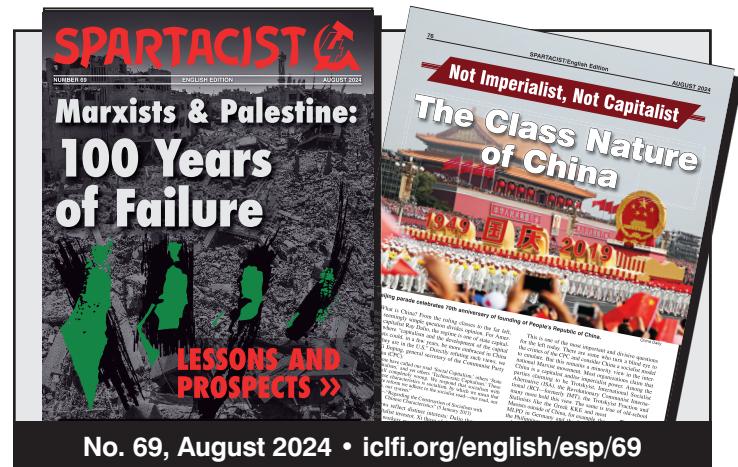
Hara-Kiri for Harris

To stop the Israeli onslaught, it is essential to stop the flow of weapons from the West, centrally from the U.S. Over the past year, there have been countless pro-Palestinian demonstrations and even a short-lived but militant student movement against the genocide in Gaza. However, in the past few weeks the movement in the U.S. has to a large degree liquidated itself in order to avoid damaging the electoral prospects of Kamala Harris, who everyone knows is entirely committed to defending Israel.

Nothing symbolizes the current impasse more than the pathetic “uncommitted” movement. A few months ago, it encouraged Democratic Party primary voters to write “uncommitted” on their ballots as a pressure tactic on the party leadership. Although thousands followed the movement’s lead, it predictably achieved nothing and was shoved to the curb by the Democrats. The movement was even denied its miserable demand of having a single Palestinian speaker—no matter which one—address the Chicago Democratic convention. Now, after weeks of groveling and nothing to show for their efforts, the uncommitted movement declined to endorse Harris, advocating instead to vote against Trump...but not for a third party—i.e., to vote for Harris.

This lamentable spectacle—cheered at every step by most of the left—goes a long way to explain why the Palestinian movement in the West has been so ineffective in wresting the slightest concession, much less stopping arms shipments. Instead of building a working-class opposition to both parties of U.S. imperialism, as each competes to be more Zionist than the other, the movement has sought to pull the Democratic Party toward the side of Palestine. The absurdity of this strategy is shown by the fact that even Palestinian American congresswoman Rashida Tlaib, who has attracted the ire of the entire U.S. media and establishment, has remained in the Democratic Party despite its support to genocide. This shows that it is not the Palestinian movement that has influenced the Democratic Party but that the movement has sacrificed itself for the Democrats.

Meanwhile, tens of thousands of Boeing Machinists and ILA longshoremen have engaged in strike action. Even though the ILA criminally continued to ship weapons, the strikes certainly caused more disruption for U.S. arms manufacturers than all the campus occupations combined. The problem is that the pro-Palestinian movement is utterly incapable of connecting with these workers, many of whom hate the liberal establishment to



their bones and would rather vote Trump. At best, liberal activists make a moral case to workers as to why they should support Palestine; at worst they treat conservative workers with contempt and as “part of the problem.”

What liberals miss is the basic point that it is not in the interest of American workers to ship missiles that cause death and chaos around the world. It is the children of American workers who will be the first ones sent to kill and be killed for the profits of U.S. imperialism. Many workers instinctively know that the increased insecurity and precarity they face in their daily lives has much to do with America’s forever wars. Instead of kowtowing to the very party committing genocide and breaking strikes, and instead of trying to peddle liberal drivel to the working class, the pro-Palestinian movement must seek to connect the Palestinian cause to that of working-class emancipation in the U.S. itself.

- *Stop arms shipments to Israel! U.S. crimes abroad will come at the expense of workers at home.*
- *For black liberation, for Palestinian liberation!*
- *Oppose Democrats and Republicans! For a Workers Party—Vote PSL!*

Where Are the BRICS?

An effective alliance is one in which the whole is stronger than the sum of its parts. The BRICS+ bloc is precisely the opposite. When it comes to Palestine, or any other great geopolitical conflict for that matter, it is utterly irrelevant. The problem is that each member country has vastly different and often conflicting interests. On the question of the war in Gaza, for example, you have one member state, Iran, which is in direct conflict with Israel. And then you have India, which has close relations with Israel and is ruled by a chauvinist anti-Muslim party. Clearly, when it comes to Palestine the BRICS+ as a bloc will not play any kind of independent role.

But what about the other big countries that compose this bloc, such as Russia and China? Russia has been providing a degree of military support to Iran, including air defense batteries. However, Russia seems more intent on avoiding a regional escalation than advancing the cause of Palestinian liberation. Ultimately, despite the hue and cry about Russian imperialism, there are no signs that Russia is trying to make use of the situation to push U.S. influence out of the region. Rather, Russia is focused on finishing the war in Ukraine and eventually reaching a settlement with the U.S. over Europe’s future security architecture.

And China? Surely a regime claiming to be communist would provide material support to the Palestinian resistance as the Soviet Union did for the Palestine Liberation Organization. Ha! Beyond empty gestures and pacifist platitudes, the Communist Party (CPC) has not lifted a finger for the Palestinian cause. This is true despite the fact that Palestinian liberation and the expulsion of American power from West Asia would go a long way toward reducing the threat China faces from the U.S. in East Asia. The CPC is too busy cozying up to the worst Gulf autocrats and Israeli capitalists to pay any attention to anti-imperialism and national liberation struggles, not to speak of worldwide proletarian revolution.

Of all the original BRICS countries, South Africa has probably done the most to signal that it morally stands with Palestine. To much fanfare, it brought a case against Israel for genocide at the ICC. The result? Nothing, of course. The ICC is only intended to target fallen African dictators and enemies of the U.S. This empty show of force had much more to do with shoring up Ramaphosa and the ANC’s left flank before the recent elections than with any serious commitment to Palestinian liberation. In fact, right after

the elections President Ramaphosa jumped into a coalition with the rabidly Zionist heirs of the apartheid regime. It is certainly not from this government that Palestine will get any assistance.

Does this mean that the situation is hopeless? Far from it. One does not need to praise the BRICS to accept that America’s grip on the world is getting weaker. Billions of workers and oppressed have only misery and war to expect from the U.S. and its crumbling order. Once you stop putting faith in the rotten regimes that conciliate and support the status quo, it becomes clear that there is huge potential in uniting the victims of U.S. imperialism around the world—from Palestine to Mexico to the Philippines and in the U.S. itself.

- *For an anti-imperialist front against Israel and the U.S.!*
- *Nationalize all imperialist assets and cancel the debts!*
- *No illusions in BRICS—Workers of the world, unite!*

What Next?

The situation is bleak. Every day more Palestinians are killed by the IDF and hundreds of thousands face starvation and disease. In the West Bank more Palestinian land is stolen. Israel now shows every sign of wanting to turn Lebanon into a new Gaza and to bomb Iran into submission. Whether it will succeed in this is another matter. However, if the last year has shown one thing, it is that there is no place for fatuous optimism. The UN, the international community, the ICC, the BRICS, the Muslim regimes—none will come to the Palestinians’ rescue. It is time to face the hard reality and draw lessons from the disastrous results of the past 12 months. The current leaders of the Palestinian resistance are not up to the task. Nor is the pro-Palestinian movement internationally.

Communists and socialists have little currency in the Arab world, not least because they have so far failed to provide a road forward for genuine national liberation (see “Marxists & Palestine: 100 Years of Failure,” *Spartacist* No. 69). However, every day it becomes clearer that the forces of political Islam do not have an answer either. This provides an opening for the workers movement to enter the fray on the side of the Palestinians and provide an alternative.

The task at hand is to fuse the domestic struggles of workers internationally with that of Palestinian liberation. This will be possible only if there is a struggle against the bankrupt road offered by the labor bureaucrats, liberals and conciliators who have called the shots so far. It is the urgent responsibility of all socialists, working-class militants and Palestinian activists to start debating and organizing this struggle for a new course. We cannot allow this next year to be like the last. ■

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